



By RANDALL HENDERSON

ONE of the desert trails I always find interesting is the road out of Mecca, California, which leads up into a precipitous gorge in the Orocopia foothills and eventually comes to the entrance of a narrow tributary canyon in which Hidden Springs are located.

The springs are well named. They are found in a sheltered little amphitheater less than 300 yards from the main canyon—but so well concealed that the stranger going there for the first time may have difficulty finding them without previous directions from one who knows the way.

Around the larger of the two pools is a group of veteran palms—quite evidently natives. To reach these palms it is necessary to clamber over and under huge blocks of conglomerate which have fallen from the high vertical walls overhead. But it is not a difficult trip.

The foot-trail leads through a short tunnel formed by the fallen boulders and as the visitor emerges from semi-darkness into the sunlight there suddenly comes in view one of the most charming palm oases to be found on the Colorado desert. It is a picture to thrill the most callous traveler.

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Several years ago a signboard was erected along the main highway marking the location of Hidden Springs. Immediately the vandals began to move in, and within a short time several of the trees had been destroyed by fire and the trunks of others were scarred by the initials of those nit-wits who do that kind of thing. The cove became littered with lunch boxes and the springs were clogged with debris.

But the Great Spirit who watches over the desert would not permit this to go on. Two years ago a torrential cloudburst wiped out the canyon road and carried away the signboard.

The trail has been opened again, but the sign has not been replaced. And as far as I am concerned, I hope it never is restored—at least, until adequate provision is made for the protection of those springs and palm trees.

I am glad to report that on my last visit to Hidden Springs, only a few weeks ago, I found the oasis looking cleaner and more natural than for many years. Nature will restore the beauty of this scenic retreat, if dumb humans do not interfere too much.

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This question as to how far highway officials and chambers of commerce should go in signposting the scenic places on the desert is open to debate. It is a problem with many angles. Where the security of travelers is concerned, waterholes should be posted. There can be no dispute over that point.

But when it comes to marking the scenic areas merely for picnic or sight-seeing purposes—I share the viewpoint of those

who say that it should not be done until steps have been taken for the protection of native plant life and water supply.

Those who have a genuine interest in seeking out the remote arroyos and springs and rock formations will find a way to reach these places without a signpost at every turn in the trail. This type of visitor does not deface the landscape.

It is natural that chambers of commerce and other promotional agencies should want to capitalize their scenic assets as much as possible. And I have no quarrel with them as long as they recognize a twofold responsibility—to preserve as well as publicise.

Hidden Springs has furnished a striking example of the penalty that must be paid when natural beauty spots are made accessible to the public without restriction or guardian of any kind.

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So much for that! And now we'll call the monthly spelling class together and see what can be done about this word Piute, or Piaute, or Payute, or—well, it is that Indian name which the writers have abused so badly.

Recently two men I regard as qualified authorities have written me that the word properly is Pahute or Pah-Ute. The former spelling is used by George E. Perkins of Overton, Nevada. He has spent much of his life among these Indians and speaks their language. The same spelling, with the hyphen, is given by Chas. Battye of San Bernardino who lived a half century ago among the Chemehuevis, an offshoot of the Nevada tribe.

According to these veterans Pah is the Ute word for water, and forms the first syllable of many Indian names in Nevada and California.

Here at the Desert Magazine office we are inclined to follow the authority of the old-timers, and use the spelling Pahute. Not that we want to start a controversy, but rather because the true pronunciation of the first syllable is "paw" rather than "pie," and it would seem therefore that the original spelling is most logical. The question is open to debate, however.

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And now I would like to remark in closing that I wish these desert poets were not always such serious minded folks. I'll grant that the desert has a strong appeal to the deeper emotions. But we also have a lot of fun out here in the cacti and sand dunes, and I really would like to sprinkle a little humor on that poetry page now and then—if some of our verse-writing contributors will furnish the rhymes.